

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Rabbit Valley Working Group Meeting Minutes
April 22, 2002

Attendees:

Art Donoho	Nadja Brozina	Dave Farny	Lovell Sasser
Bob Silbernagel	Arleta Carr	N. J. Fulmer	Troy Schnurr
Gene Arnesen	Jim Cooper	Neal McKinstry	Julie Stotler
Sue Benjamin	Dave Dunsmoor	John Potter	Paul Toft
		Eric Rechel	

Greetings and Introductions

Chairman Dave Farny called the meeting to order at 5:48 p.m. There were 17 people present when the meeting began.

Working Group Discussions

Jim Cooper, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Transportation Planner, presented a report entitled "Rabbit Valley Trail Planning Objectives." This report lists guidelines and opportunities for developing a new trail system in Rabbit Valley. Jim also reported on the serious need for new signs in the area, with existing signage too small. Jim explained that the current design is only adequate for users traveling no faster than 3 miles per hour, and even horseback riders generally travel faster than that.

With regard to the trails themselves, Jim explained that piñon-juniper forest is a good indicator for locating possible trails given that the ground is generally harder than the sandy desert floor. Thus, the soils are more stable, and the trees limit both noise and visual impacts. Jim indicated that the Harley Dome area, just southwest of the Rabbit Valley exit off I-70, presents great opportunities for new trails. Jim went on to say that he would like to see Trail 2 relocated up the hill to get it out of the sandy area, as well as to eliminate the places where it continually crosses the main road.

Responding to a question, Jim said, "I strongly urge you not to segregate trail users. There's not enough miles of trails out there for everybody to have their own, separate trails. Also, I'm really thrilled with the way different user groups get along out there."

N. J. Fulmer said that she was "pretty excited" about Jim's efforts aimed at designing a new trail system, instead of just using what is in Rabbit Valley now. But, she questioned how much new trail would be built as opposed to old trails that would be closed.

Jim responded that it is impossible, at this time, to know exact mileage for new trails and trail closures. Jim said that he expects there to be more trails overall, “but they will be better trails in less-sensitive areas.”

Paul Toft asked why the road to Ruby Canyon is closed to motorized traffic. Troy Schnurr, Recreation Ranger, reported that the road closure was done at the request of BLM attorneys. A rock overhang, in one section of the trail, is thought to be a safety hazard to the public.

Bob Silbernagel asked the Working Group whether it might be wise to adopt a resolution urging the BLM to keep Jim in the Grand Junction field office, at least until the draft management plan is completed. Jim is currently here on detail from BLM California.

Art Donoho stated that the BLM and citizens’ groups have “a unique opportunity to try to design usable trails, instead of fighting over trails that weren’t designed to be used as they are.” Because of both that opportunity and Jim’s expertise regarding trails, Bob’s proposed resolution was unanimously approved. Bob will draft the resolution and forward a copy to Dave and Jane Ross, Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) Planning and Environmental Coordinator.

Eric Rechel questioned whether locating trails over rocky surfaces was such a good idea, noting that such trails have an impact on the ecosystem that thrives in the rocks. He also urged those who use Rabbit Valley for recreation to “stop seeing it as an amusement park.”

Jim responded that about 120,000 acres are included in the CCNCA, and only 14,000 of those acres are managed for motorized recreation. The number of people using those 14,000 acres, however, far exceeds the number using the remaining acreage within the National Conservation Area (NCA). “Our job is to manage it for the best possible use,” Jim stated.

Art said there is an issue regarding the motocross track just southeast of the main parking area. Art continued that a lot of people want the track to remain, but it needs to be contained. Riders are going further and further off the original track, impacting and destroying surrounding areas. There are additional concerns about a trail that goes through the motocross track, creating a dangerous situation.

Troy hopes to put a post-and-rail fence around the circumference of the track to contain it. Jim added that a portion of Trail 4 running through the track could be rerouted to a nearby wash.

Lovell Sasser reported that she had received a note from an Aurora, Colorado, woman, who had visited Rabbit Valley on April 15 when Lovell and others were riding in the area. The woman indicated that she had been visiting for many years and would like to see better camping facilities developed throughout the area.

The meeting was adjourned shortly after 7:00 p.m.